

NEW RELEASE



Star Wars goes back to

STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

Stars: Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Harrison Ford
Showing: Grand Central

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The Independent

created more buzz and anticipation than any movie in living memory.

Ever since its trailer was released, there has been a near hysterical religious fervour about *The Force Awakens* among fans, many of whom weren't even born when George Lucas created the *Star Wars* franchise in 1977.

The reintroduction of the original cast members (Harrison Ford's Han Solo, Carrie Fisher's Princess Leia, Peter Mayhew's Chewbacca) has heightened expectations yet further.

The good news is that the

reboot turns out to be a thoroughly invigorating affair, much more compelling than the "prequel trilogy" that began with *The Phantom Menace* in 1999. This is back-to-the-future film-making: a rip-roaring adventure that comes heavily steeped in nostalgia and that has all the elements in place (the John Williams music, the lightsabres, the droids, the old spaceships) that made the original films so magical.

As the story starts in the galaxy far, far away, we're treated to an immensely lengthy scroll of

text explaining just where matters stand.

Luke Skywalker has vanished in mysterious circumstances.

The "dark side" is emerging again in the shape of the "First Order", under supreme leader Snoke and the new Darth Vader-like villain, Kylo Ren (Adam Driver).

A map to Skywalker's whereabouts is hidden inside droid BB-8, a lovable little robot who looks a Mr Men puppet. The resistance wants to get to Skywalker but so do the First Order stormtroopers.

"THE force is calling you."

In a year of hugely hyped new movies (*Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Spectre*, the final *Hunger Games*), the new *Star Wars* has

CLOSE TO TRIUMPH: In a scene from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* are (from left) Kylo Ren (Adam Driver), Finn (John Boyega) and Rey (Daisy Ridley).

Below bottom: Harrison Ford's Han Solo and Carrie Fisher's Princess Leia.



future with top thriller

Director JJ Abrams, working from a script he co-wrote with Lawrence Kasdan and Michael Arndt, is very sure-footed in combining the joshing, tongue-in-cheek humour with the action and the occasional scenes of terror and torture.

Abrams is helped by excellent central performances from two young British actors, Daisy Ridley and John Boyega. Ridley plays Rey, a beautiful, tomboyish young "scavenger" who ekes out an existence, collecting scraps on the desert planet of Jakku. Her back story is deliberately left

vague. She brings a thoroughly appealing mix of ingenuousness and defiance to her role. She also turns out to be an expert engineer and spaceship pilot.

"The girl knows her stuff," Han Solo pays her what for him is the ultimate compliment.

Boyega is Finn, a stormtrooper who recoils at the brutality and violence of his bosses. He's a reluctant and slightly hapless hero but one with tremendous resourcefulness.

Counterbalancing the newcomers are Harrison Ford's still sprightly, still mischievous

Han Solo, delighted to be reunited with his creaky but reliable old spaceship, the Millennium Falcon. Carrie Fisher's Leia has changed her hair but has held up pretty well, too. As ever, the plotting is incredibly over determined. There are strong Oedipal elements here, strange spiritual references and characters, good and evil alike, who turn out to have close family connections.

Much of the movie consists of chase sequences. Certain scenes here look as if they could have been taken wholesale from the

very first *Star Wars*.

There are moments when the storytelling becomes just a little cheesy but these are counterbalanced by often awe-inspiring set design and the very well choreographed set-pieces. There are also a few genuinely startling plot twists.

The *Force Awakens* could easily have turned into an almighty anti-climax. Instead, it is very close to a triumph — a film that fans of the old movies will relish but one that looks bound to capture the imagination of a new audience, too.